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ABSTRACT

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Beams of Meaning and Semiotic Territory: Cooperation as Space-sharing

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Abstract
Spaces of meaning are stratified to establish congruence among those belonging to the same semiotic "beams." Individuals may be geographically close yet unable to cooperate because they are not attuned to the same semiotic territory. Families of signs characterize each semiotic territory, whose inhabitants are linked conceptually. Symbols and metaphors produce a consensual effect among attuned participants belonging to the same beam of meaning. This neo-Aristotelian and neo-Avicennian interpretation of spaces of interaction will be reflected upon in reference to some school situations.

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In this text I offer a demonstration based on two premises. The first premise is that there exist "beams" of meaning analogous to a beam of white light comprising the spectrum of colors. In fact, I would go further and suggest that beams of meaning determine cultural and social currents. The second premise, which is neo-Aristotelian, defines meaning as the space of action and intelligence, whether potential or actualized. The demonstration: time is a manifestation of this mental space. This agrees with the theory of relativity, according to which time and space are reciprocal functions. Thus meaning is produced by the collision of intelligence with space and the reconstituted temporal sequentiality that results from it.

In this perspective, spaces of meaning are stratified so that they establish congruence among members of the same epistemic beam. As McLaren (1998, p. xiv) has written, "our desires are shaped by the semiotic network within subjects articulating their subjective positions." Individuals may be close to each other geographically and yet not cooperate with each other because they do not belong to the same conceptual beam. Beams are distinguished by signs and their members linked by a shared symbolic system. The creation of this symbolic system, or of a linking metaphor, facilitates consensus and characterizes the acting mind. The acting mind is the active meaning that illuminates the passage to action from a state of potentiality, or, to use the term from scholastic philosophy, from a state *in posse*. In this text I present several indications of this. Following a brief overview of the relation between territoriality and meaning in Indo-European and medieval cosmology and then in Edward Soja's postmodern geography, I examine the meaning relation that is established between teachers and students. I show how meaning beams are organized and how they determine both action and meaning. The acting mind is a neo-Avicennian theory that allows us to take account of the cultural terrains and symbolic substrata that differentiate human groups.

Virtual space

The virtuality of space is a current concept that has become familiar in the form of cyberspace. This concept has a history, which we will briefly look into. Virtual spaces are meaning spaces: space produces meaning and, reciprocally, meaning constructs space. In fact, the concept of space as meaning corresponds to a very old tradition of Indo-European origin. It was passed from the Persians to the Greeks and then spread to the Arabs before being reappropriated by medieval European theologians and then by the humanists, who ascribed a completely different significance to it — one that is not so distant from Edward Soja's reflections, which we will examine hereafter.

Going back to the Indo-European origins of this concept, we find that certain Vedic texts describe lived space poetically as the product of the channels of the senses. Since they underpin the universe, the senses have a constitutive power in creation. They are *devas*, intelligent beings that proceed from the first light and bring various functions together in the process of intelligence's self-manifestation. Georges Dumézil (1941), working in comparative grammar,

has observed that the word *deva* contains the root *Iau*, which means light; the same root is later found in the Greek word *Zeus* and Latin compounds such as *Jupiter* (in ancient Vedic, *Io Pita*, "Father Light"). Vedic poetry is coded, each space term bearing a function as the representation of an aspect of the intelligence that underlies manifestation. For example, a cow is a symbol of fertility, energy, and abundance, easily understood in primitive societies, a symbol whose survival we see in the human geography of contemporary India. The proliferation of the cow is in fact proof, if proof were needed, of the impact of symbol systems on the spaces in which human life unfolds. Under the Vedic approach, creation and intelligence are inseparable, with the contact between the creature and the source of its manifestation requiring channels of communication, messages and messengers; and the nature of this contact being a determining force in the human being's status. This developing status corresponds to phases of intelligence, translated into geographic space by eras of peace and fertility or periods of war and social antagonism. We will come back to this when we look at Soja's definition of war.

I said that traces of this Indo-European concept are to be found in the Middle Ages. In his *L'intelligence collective : Pour une anthropologie du cyberspace*, Pierre Lévy (1997) traces the history of the concept. A certain Persian and Jewish theosophical tradition proposed a neo-Platonic reading of Aristotle.[1] This approach led to the spread, in the 10th century, of the concept of the acting mind in the Muslim world. The acting mind was believed to link, through thought, human beings to each other and human beings to God in a consciousness emerging from their collective exchanges. For Aristotle, God is pure Action; the active intellect holds a central place in his philosophy. The cosmology of al-Farabi (872-950) and Avicenna (the Latin name for ibn Sina — 980-1037) is closely linked to this concept. The process of knowing creates cosmological space: the world proceeds from experience, and celestial hierarchies are imbricated in any perceptual space. In fact, they constitute knowledge. Angels are perceptual qualities constituted from experiential space. Thus beings that achieve a vision of space enter into meaning, independently of time. These prophets, capable of perceiving time in space, come into contact with the moving principles of the world. They are then one with the acting mind, even while maintaining an intelligence distinct from the principle that that intelligence expresses. Thus, level by level, strata of consciousness are embodied in space, bestowing meaning on the dynamics of life.

In Avicennian tradition, the acting mind is an "Angel," the coming together of souls in a collective meaning and direction, a corner of the heavens, the tracing of the boundary of a moving intelligence. The Angel gives meaning to action, because it is the meaning of space and its movement. The passage to action, in the Aristotelian sense of being born into intelligence, is the issuance of meaning and a merging with the Angel that, being the acting mind, gives

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[1]It should be recalled that Aristotle, the son of the physician to the king of Macedonia, was first Plato's disciple, then his rival, and preserved a marked admiration and respect for him.

meaning. Space constitutes virtual action, which is only actualized when the acting mind becomes aware of its own movement. Space in potentiality (possible space) becomes space in action (real space) when it is inhabited by the consciousness of the Angel. Thus space acquires a new dimension when the acting mind is actualized within it. Its meaning is realized. That space, linked by thought to collective thought, resonates with spaces being moved in other spheres and by other dynamics. This synergy adds meaning to space, a phenomenon that can be termed an irradiation by the meaning for which the acting mind is both receiver and sender. A merging with the meaning of the space confers the power of vision. From this contemplation are born all forms of knowledge. Contact with space can only become real by reason of contact with the Angel. Without the acting mind, space is only potentiality. A century after the death of Avicenna, this perspective was extended to include multiple relations between human and angelic spaces. In the 12th century, Abu'l-Barakat al-Baghdadi described multiple angelic personalities, something Avicenna had not done. According to this new concept, space in potentiality is actualized by groupings of souls whose acting mind molds human orientations, trajectories, and geography. This concept postulates the existence of plural individual geographies linked by networks of shared meaning. Families of the mind share a certain meaning of the real and radiate the meaning of one particular acting mind through the space that has become action. This plural conception was criticized by Thomas Aquinas, who wrongly ascribed it to Avicenna.

Humanism transformed these ideal spaces into cultural spaces. In contrast to the project of theosophy, the humanist project has meaning emerge from the foundation. Light is born of a community of standardized meaning. On this view, space is centripetal and ascending, whereas before it was conceived as centrifugal and descending. The angelic sources of meaning are perceived as immanent, springing forth from the human when the human approaches the human, and recognizes in it its own human identity. Evil, then, is the absence of communication, the turning in on oneself, a reason for excommunication from the group. In this one can discern certain premises of the Frankfurt school, Habermas' communicative action being perhaps no more than a neo-Aristotelian recursion. Knowledge from above is replaced by a horizontal, shared knowledge; intelligence is the act of communication and emerges from reciprocity and not from an external intelligence. Beams of interest distinguish human groups. Is this a matter of intellectual tribalism? Human beings take sustenance from cultural beams that assign them to a social space. In the Renaissance, medieval clannishness was transformed into cultural schools, schools of thought, schools of the arts; and plurality came to be seen as an enrichment of the human heritage. Thus humanism offered a transfigured version of clannishness, according to which membership is dictated by noble inclinations whose manifestations allow for the actualization of the most refined aspects of intelligence and taste. The humanists appropriated space and transfigured it, for example in the sphere of architecture.

The influence of virtual space on manifestation

Working within this long tradition, Wilhelm von Humboldt proposed the principle of the correlation of forms within the functional unity of human life. For him, the interior form of language constitutes the dynamic giving of form to the mind. The internal meaning of language is immanent; it gathers together the silent impulses of a language category belonging to a founding group. The individual being, whether an individual or a nation-state, is actualized as an expression and coming into effect of the energy that has engendered it. The mind is thus bound in loyalty to perceptible space and to those intellectual energies that ally themselves with the vitality of the imagination of the senses. The actualization of meaning through the power of language, according to this view, causes the sphere of the universe's virtual contents (*Vorstellung*) to pass into the perceptible space of its representation and dynamic implementation (*Darstellung*). Since representation is a passage to action and learning (*Bildung*), it also leads from education to the molding of character (*Formung* or *Form*-ation). In this perspective, a symbol is the threshold manifestation of a linguistic fact. "Language is an action, it manifests the truly creative initiative of the mind; and in each language this action designates the heart of its individuation, the hearth of its manifestations" (von Humboldt, 1936/1974, p. 364). For example, there exists a "correlation between the interior form of thought and the phonetic component .... [This synthesis] presupposes a truly creative action of the mind" (p. 365).

The principle of correlations was well known in medieval scholarship; Eco (1992) refers to it when examining cosmological signatures. The mind is conveyed through language, which mediates the relationship with nature. Variations of language indicate variations of mind corresponding to geographic specifics. In von Humboldt's time, German linguists were sure they had identified the *Ursprache* — the mother of all languages — in Sanskrit. A little later, the existence of ancient Vedic was discovered. In Vedic and Sanskrit texts, as well as the variously denatured traditions analyzed by Eco (1992), one sees traces of the notion that linguistic facts are determined by geography and model inhabitants' minds. Like the links to be observed, according to the notion of microcosmic/macrocosmic correspondence, between what is above and what is below, the spirit of a place dictates the lifestyles, language, and customs of those living in a given region. That this notion had been bequeathed to the German philosophers and linguists of von Humboldt's day is to be explained by the rediscovery of Sanskrit, whose near-perfect grammatical description by Panini suggested an artificial language or one divinely generated. Sanskrit is not the only language to have given rise to such speculation: according to Cabalistic thought, Hebrew harbors a secret numerology that makes it possible to understand the universe. Traditional Chinese writing also corresponds to cosmological principles. Von Humboldt found traces of this in some twenty cultures and languages, from Javanese Kavi to Angolan Bundu, from Persian Zend to Inca Quechua, from the Mayan languages of the Yucatan to the Cherokee of the Carolinas. Edward Sapir made cautious use of some of von Humboldt's postulates in his observations on the influence of the environment on language. In his opinion, the physical environment is only reflected in language

to the extent that it has been influenced by social factors (Sapir, 1968, p. 74). Thus, a reference to something from the physical sphere implies that the linguistic group has reached an agreement on its existence and on the interest that it represents. In this situation the influence is to be found in the content, the vocabulary, the phonetics, or the morphology. Social institutions are themselves constantly creatively influenced, revived, or reaffirmed by individual communicative acts exchanged by the group's members (Sapir, 1968, p. 91).

The relationship between environment, mental models, and language is in fact the subject of one chapter of Thomas Sebeok's 1991 book, *A sign is just a sign*, the chapter called "In What Sense is Language a Primary Modeling System?" Here, Sebeok takes up anew the propositions he had put forward in 1970 at the Moscow-Tartu School with Ivanov: "The notion of a secondary modeling system in the broad sense refers to an ideological model of the world where the environment stands in reciprocal relationship with some other system, such as an individual organism, a collectivity, a computer, or the like, and where its reflection functions as control of this system's total mode of communication. A model of the world thus constitutes a program for the behavior of the individual, the collectivity, the machine, etc., since it defines its choice of operations, as well as the rules and motivations underlying them" (p. 49). Sebeok then writes that human productions, institutions, the movements of civilizations, are molded by such models. As the chapter unfolds, he addresses the relationship between this *Umwelt* and perceptual activity: the model has an impact on the perceptible world and on nature. True, language evolved as a primary form of adaptation to the environment, but today, as Sebeok would have us understand, language must be understood to be a secondary modeling system, as opposed, for example, to endosemiotic models such as the genetic, immune, and neural codes.

Considering mental models as signs in the Peircian sense nevertheless implies neo-Platonic top-down modeling (p. 57), which is very different from the Sojan perspective I will now describe. Edward Soja describes the relational, creative role of material proximity in the modeling of social equilibrium, for example. As in the Humboldtian approach, in Soja geography has an impact on form, expressive potential, and the psyche. In von Humboldt, however, this impact is born of a functional unity within which entities and meanings move and pass from virtuality to representational actualization.

The spatialization of history

If, for humanism, evil consists in the absence of communication, how has modernity found the means to place people in communication with each other and what are the inevitable paradoxes in the geography of communication? Edward Soja has analyzed these and proposes their postmodern transcendence. What follows is a brief history of postmodern geographies in the Sojan oeuvre.

It is hard to trace Soja in databases, because he is swamped by a profusion of articles in the agrifood disciplines. His name covers enormous economic space. Nevertheless, following a few clues it is possible to recover two spaces in time: one outstanding set of works is clustered in the 1970s, following his Ph.D. from Syracuse, in the period when he was assistant professor at Northwestern University; a second group occurs in the years 1989-1996 and constitutes the main focus of attention here. Soja thought in interdisciplinary terms very early on, examining geographical problems within the context of the interrelation of the social, the economic, and the political, moved by the will to transcend the existing dichotomy between the reign of quantity and the reign of quality (or of description, to use his term). This integrative change arose within a quest for values, values whose origins, Soja concedes, are difficult to trace.

In 1968, Soja broached the geography of modernization in the origins of a nation in Kenya. The territory in question was defined before colonization, which Soja alludes to as a penetration of the fertile fabric of traditional African society. The intrusion of colonization created a European island in an African sea and initiated a transition manifested in considerable changes in the society's modes of communication. Transport and communications now took on modern structures: they spatialized modernity, giving primacy to the Kikuyu people largely by reason of their geographic proximity to the major European centers, including Nairobi. Thus history mingled with geography, with the highlands' sphere of influence corresponding to urbanization and underpinning the subsystems of modernization.

"The imprint of colonial penetration and the establishment of effective administrative control temporarily froze the pre-European cultural geography, and Kenya was compartmentalized into a series of European and African reserves" (Soja, 1968, p. 101). Together, economics and education drew the African out of traditional spaces into a broad and powerful network of communications. However, "geographic proximity and accessibility to the major modes and flow lines within the new circulatory system affected the degree to which various people were transformed by the processes of change" (p. 101). Spatializing the factors that contributed to modernity, Soja analyzed this flow of new meaning by means of principal component analyses.

The next book of Edward Soja's that I was able to find is called *The African experience. Vol. II, syllabus*. John Paden is listed as first author (1970). The book reviews the essential aspects of ethnic culture, from family and kinship to the arts and music. It presents racial resistance as articulated against a background of slavery and examines the impact of colonialism under the aspect of changes in the African character. African nationalisms and pan-African supranationalism form the context of both religious and political issues. African creativity is exported abroad; links to French culture and African-American ethnicity allow for a return to both temporal and spatial origins and the identificational reconquest of the substratum shared with these. Here the aim is to have African identity recognized outside the continent, not in the superficial way represented by the "proliferation of poor imitation art, often crudely executed and highly commercialized (such as the airport curios which have been imported in increasing numbers to Europe and America)" (Paden & Soja, 1970, p. 360), but in a deep way, the way

of the awakening of Black consciousness. Self-imposed personal exiles such as James Baldwin's in Paris are analyzed.

In 1970, Edward Soja received a grant from the National Science Foundation which led to the 1971 publication of a small work by the Association of American Geographers, *The political organization of space*. Soja's original conceptualization of human territoriality begins in earnest with this work. He traces its foundations in Aristotelian logic and Greek geometry: the nation-state founded on the Euclidean properties of space imposes the concept of territorial belonging on the world. Previous societies had other connections to time and space. Suddenly space was subjected to the concept of territorial identity. War resulted from this expansionist concept, since modernity was not yet aware of methods of imposing cultural influence without invading the physical space of the other. War is defined through the application of the principles that the identity of nations rests on. Soja's analysis shows the extent to which influence is conveyed through communication. From this point of view, he considers it possible to find substitutes for war, "whatever functions war may serve" (1971, p. 32).

Thus Soja proposes a framework for geographical analysis, resituating the concept of boundaries: "Each human being creates his own 'activity space' which becomes the context for his most detailed knowledge of his environment and within which most of his daily activities are regularly carried out. At the most micro-scale, each individual surrounds himself with a portable series of spaces, or personal distance zones, 'bubbles' which guide and shape his interaction with other individuals. Thus without formal boundaries, space becomes organized and structured into focal points, core areas, networks of interaction, domains, spheres of influence, hinterlands, buffer zones, no-man's-lands, cultural homelands, regions, neighborhoods, gang 'turfs', and ghettos" (1971, p. 1).

Soja refuses to replace the old orthodoxy with a new one. He seeks to explore the political organization of space: the ways that interaction structures space for the fulfilment of political functions. To this end he studies methods of urban categorization in Kenya, Sunderland, and Los Angeles. His perspective becomes anthropological: it becomes reasonable to ask why territoriality is so important in the animal kingdom. Its purposes are safety and protection, but also include regulation of the density of occupation of space. And last, territorial concerns aim towards the structuring and cohesiveness of the group, thus balancing the social forces of cooperation, conflict, and competition.

Animal territoriality emerges from dominance behaviors. Social position is translated into space. Movements and the field of action indicate the power for influence of an animal organism. This is equally true for human microterritorial bubbles, as suggested in Edward Hall's studies in proxemics in *The silent language* (1959). It can be argued that the notion of private property flows from territoriality in this sense. Nevertheless, in the case of human macroterritoriality, it may be conceived that social territoriality is cultural above all.

In his 1989 book, *Postmodern geographies: The reassertion of space in critical social theory*, Edward Soja reduces time to space and denounces the historical perspective and "the despatializing distortions of historicism" (p. 7). His preface is a postscript. True, spatially it is located at the start of the book and it ironically demonstrates how the segmentation of space can come up against the axis of time. Soja revisits a series of postmodern authors and cuts himself off definitively from "Cartesian cartography" (*ibid.*) He proposes "a social ontology in which space matters from the very beginning" (*ibid.*), which rises up against the silences of history. According to Soja, this spatialization constitutes a transcendence of the temporal concepts that influenced both Heideggerian and Sartrian ontology and Anthony Giddens' processing of space and time (1981).

Soja emphasizes space over time. In the spirit of Foucault (1986), he argues that time is not dead. The hegemonic obsession with history has tended to occlude and foreclose the role of space in social life. Even Marxism required a metacritique in order to advance from its orthodox historicism and spatial fixity — which is a kind of absolutism and overgeneralization — and reassert spatial praxis and human geographies. Despite his insistence on space, Soja's position is not one of spatial fetishism or hyper-territorialism. Rather, it aims to increase the consciousness of space and synchrony at the intersection of enactments of the acting mind. There is a political dimension to space: space is the place where actions and substance acquire meaning. The deconstruction of historicism leads to a strategic reconstruction of space and a passage from resistance to flexible specialization and differentiation (Soja, 1989, p. 74).

Soja proposes a socio-spatial dialectic that will become trialectic in his 1996 book on Thirdspace. There is a "distinction between space *per se*, space as a contextual given, and socially-based spatiality, the created space of social organization and production" (1989, p. 79). Where time and space were linked by light in the Indo-European and Avicennian cosmology, the human geography of Soja links time, space, and matter. Ironically, though he would take a postmodern stance, Soja's physical vision of space and matter corresponds to modernist canons, or rather to pre-quantum physics. A quantum physics of space designates the energetic and light sources of matter in terms of wave functions and photonic light (Jahn & Dunne, 1987). Soja's conception, in contrast, is neo-Avicennian: he shows how nature, understood as the context of life, models enminded nature-in-action and predetermines human relationships. Organized space gives rise to intelligent strata. It is interesting to see that in the revisionist view of Castells (1977, p. 115, cited by Soja, 1989, p. 83), "space is a material product," as it was in the Indo-European tradition of the *varnas*, where space or ether was the fifth element and made possible the sense of hearing. Both rely on the assumption of a preexisting law governing a thing's existence as object and the transformation of such existence. In the present text space is defined as a relational substance.

The "historical geography" of social systems provides strong evidence that the "transformations of the spatio-temporal matrices...are the real substratum of mythical, religious, philosophical or 'experiential' representations of space-time" (Poulantzas, 1978, p. 26, cited by Soja, 1989,

p. 118). This view matches Wilhelm von Humboldt's perspective (1936/1974): for him, geography was a determining constituent of the mind and explained language, culture, and society.

Culturally speaking, the territories of towns and nations are divided. These geographical divisions have a social meaning: each division represents a stratum of society. But the space that determines identity has changed its meaning in postmodern civilization: telecommunications have conferred spatial ubiquity on it. It is therefore now based on a politicization of interterritorial communication. This logic achieves a fascinating extension in cyberspace, and I am tempted to go one step further in this direction, and to argue that cyberspace is the point of passage to semiotic territoriality. We are in process of passing from a static definition of territoriality to a dynamics of culture whereby conceptual boundaries acquire political meaning. Thematic angels are blanketing the planet and bringing together cultural groups.

As Soja shows, spatial identity is affirmed through methods of communication and in the zones that we communicate in. But currently, geographic regionalisms are being lessened in favor of conceptual regionalisms. The sense of exclusivity that characterizes social territoriality is taking on a thematic allure. In one sense it could be said that clannishness is being reborn to the detriment of the nation-state, and the semiotics of worldwide human relations are taking on a tribal appearance. In the postmodern world, there are no more castes. Instead, we have honeycombs in virtual beehives, humming with conceptual nutriment (such as web pages crammed with information and the offer of services). These location-less hives belong to no national territory and their shared spaces are henceforward immaterial. Within these cultural enclaves, these communications ghettos, belonging is displayed by means of clusters of tastes, colors, vocabularies, lures, and molar behaviors which allow for a mutual recognition that lies beyond and below the official structures of public meaning. They are one with the beams of Avicenna's acting mind. Public meaning has now become the property of lobbies seeking to win back powers of intercommunication while distancing their thematic networks from the systematic co-opting of their key concepts for economic purposes.

Semiotic territoriality in the world of the school

In his latest work, Soja (1996) develops the trialectical ontology of Henri Lefebvre (historical, spatial, social) into a trialectics of space: lived, perceived, conceived. The spatiology of Lefebvre constitutes an effort to escape Cartesian dualism, whose "stubborn bi-polarity" (Soja, 1996, p. 36) prohibits the conciliation of materialism with idealism. Otherness is the focus in Thirdspace, and the analytical space is the social space of the everyday.

> *Everything* comes together in Thirdspace: subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the

> repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending story. (Soja, 1996, pp. 56-57).

In the remainder of this text, using a reflective journal that I wrote up in 1993 during classroom observations, I would like to examine how the concepts of semiotic territoriality and meaning beams can be actualized. How does space divide functional units with their differences, both political and epistemic? How do networks of communication and non-communication within a classroom explain cultural strata, those cultural strata that prevent some human beings from encountering each other conceptually despite their geographic proximity? Here are some mental spaces that enlightened me when I was conducting classroom research in Manitoba.

CASE 1

The first case illustrates perception of a connection between interior reflection, or the "acting mind" of a situation, and the events that unfolded within it.

Research journal — 5 May 1993

This morning, while observing the class, I noticed a girl student wearing a long, pretty flowered dress beneath which protruded jeans and hiking boots. At first, I thought some genius of the fashion world had had the notion of freeing the human form from the shackles created by our daily choice of our clothed appearance. With the balance between animus and anima restored, soon men and women would free themselves up by submitting to the newly-imposed fashion order, and all wear heavy jeans and light dresses. But while we were eating, a friend of mine opposed this view. For her, the dress worn over jeans represented the first stage in a return to femininity. This friend explained that in her experience, when you're used to wearing jeans you feel terribly naked under a dress. Dress-over-jeans, then, would be Phase 1 in preparation for Phase 2, and Phase 2 implies you take off the jeans. The jeans-dress gives me a salty-sweet sensation.

The research I'm doing is not related to students' dress habits, but this does represent one of the many components of the complex classroom environment. When I come into the classroom, some teachers introduce me to their pupils and some don't. Before long, I become part of the furniture. Then our experiences blend in a dialogue between present and past, among the evocative aspects of classroom events that reverberate through my storehouse of theories, anecdotes, lived experience and memories. Phenomenologically, two stories are entangled in each other: the story of the classroom events, and my life story. This entanglement, which Clandinin (1989) described using the sound-based metaphor of narrative rhythm, takes the form in my own life of basting, of the somewhat slack stitching between the weft of my life and the embroidery of events. Using a metaphor from Mallarmé, I distinguish between the broad, flaxen thread of life and the lacework of the narrative I make of life when I write. Mallarmé the poet embroidered words, the lace of memory, onto the white paper. Mallarmé the translator reconstructed the universe of Edgar Allan Poe in French. An author transfers universes onto pages.

This afternoon (I transfer the universe of the present tense onto these pages) the students, fourteen-year-olds, are rehearsing sketches. I've got a little time to write, because the different groups are getting ready. The teacher's strategy is to allow the students maximum liberty but yank them regularly back into line every ten minutes with two strident yells and a warning that she's writing on the blackboard. The students, well aware that this pattern is as reliable as a chronometer, suddenly (at the ninth minute) suggest to the teacher that she go out: this way, they'll be spared the impending yells. Supposedly, the principal has called her over the intercom and she didn't hear him. The strident shouts postponed, the first group starts performing its sketch. Since the teacher has gone out, the student-teacher takes over. I am an absent spectator, I seem not to be a part of the network of meaning deployed by the class.

The sketch being staged by the group takes place in a clothing store. As far as I can tell, the teacher's aim in having the students do these sketches was to get them to use the imperative. The salesman orders the client to try on a suit. Taking advantage of the teacher's absence, the student playing the part of the client makes a big deal of getting undressed to try on the new garment. The students' eyes are all glued to the student-teacher. How will she react? The student-teacher seems to find the situation perfectly natural. The students seem disappointed; just then, the teacher comes back inside and utters three strident yells. A girl student raises her hand and waves three fingers. Two students break out laughing. The teacher puts three names on the blackboard. A student makes a show of adjusting her watch: she's getting ready for the countdown to the next two shouts.

This journal entry indicates the presence of physical elements in the classroom that are anticipated by the observer's reflections: the noting of the dress-over-jeans is followed by an event related to this attainment of awareness (the de-jeansing). Similarly, the author's perception of the alternation, like an audible rhythm, between internal attention and external attention is followed by a rhythmic series of guttural spasms (the strident yells) on the part of the teacher, which suddenly form the object of a plot and become central to the students' strategy for non-learning (or for extracurricular learning). As both Edward Hall (1984) and Henri Lefebvre (1992) have noted, some rhythms are worth analyzing. Jung (1963) writes of synchronicity: we note a coincidence of a coming to awareness and events as though the human geography embraced the situation's acting mind, as if the meaning that a person emits in relation to a situation was shared semiotically by participants in the situation.

The idea here is not to suggest a mystical link between thought and situations, but to examine the congruence between the act of conceptualization and the quasi-physical sharing of events by a group of human beings, in the sense that the conceptual projection is capable of modeling collective action in line with a specific human geography. What is of interest is the examination of a case of correspondence in a semiotic light.

Let's look at the correspondence between coming to awareness and its effect on a given environment. To what extent does an internal conceptualization have a "congruence effect" in that it elicits the emergence of corresponding situational occurrences? Could it be, for instance, that, somewhat the way André Breton's poem *Nadja* foreshadowed a meeting years before it took place, thought organizes the semiotics of space and certain kinds of events follow? This is suggested by the correspondence between certain events recorded in this

research journal, which yet demonstrate its atemporal nature:

1) Reflections on dresses/jeans are followed by a near-striptease in the classroom (de-jeansing).
2) The researcher's recent reading of Edward Hall's work on certain rhythms leads him to note the rhythm of the teacher's yells; these yells suddenly lead the students to create a plot and then start to count the yells.
3) In case 3 below, the video about Amsterdam ties in with an upcoming trip to Amsterdam by the researcher. Moreover, this journal entry was incorporated into the present text just before the opening of Soja's book to the page that features photos and analyses of Amsterdam.

I am not supplying these illustrations with the aim of inducing magical thinking. The framework of this reflection is scientific. I wish to analyze correspondence phenomena under the aspect of the congruence of signs in the atemporal space of meaning, and contemplate scientifically the possible synchronicity (to resume a Jungian hypothesis) of events that imbue space with meaning.

CASE 2

All human beings carry their geography with them, in a Humboldtian sense, in the form of an accent. The accent of a European Francophone leads to immediate categorization by French-Canadian conversational partners; this categorization of accent is associated with cultural stereotypes (and in all likelihood the process of stereotyping is reciprocal and to some extent wholly justified). Geographic labeling is also the product of visibility. In one sense, racial distinctions are partly linked to primary methods of perceptual categorization, with which certain kinds of affect and secondary elements are sometimes subsequently associated. In the journal entry that follows, both these phenomena are present, suggesting both the link between identity and geography and the primacy of enminded geography over physical geographies.

Research journal — 6 May 1993

I am examining the narratives of adjustments made to language lesson-plans, in cases where the adjustments relate to life stories. This morning I've been phoning school principals to arrange for data collection. The school boards have already given me the green light. Immersion schools are mostly Anglophone, and welcome me. On the other hand, it's a privilege to get access to Manitoba's French schools: they are few and heavily solicited. From the moment I open my mouth, my European accent is remarked upon. Sensitivity to this seems to be less marked at the elementary and junior high levels than in high schools. The elite sectors of minority Francophone communities aren't keen on a European showing up to give them language lessons, which is a perfectly natural feeling. One principal has been kind enough to invite me over, providing the explanation that his school community, being bilingual, is very tolerant. Later, to show me how tolerant he is respecting people from other parts of the Francophone world, he calls over a student in the hallway and inquires after

her Haitian family. This student, amazed, answers that her mother, a Canadian, separated from her Haitian husband when the girl was born. The girl was born in Canada.

Will I be accepted as a Canadian one day? When my presence is endued with a normative impact in a Francophone environment, I'm no longer the innocent observer, a furnishing among furnishings. My presence has political effect without my noticing it. Certain fears are allayed if I speak of my Swiss origins. Switzerland's Francophones constitute 28% of the population; they voted *for* Europe. Minority groups should support each other. In contrast, my position as an ex-European in a no-man's-land makes my relations with Anglophone Canadians easier: if a European Francophone is sometimes seen as potentially aggressive by North American Francophones, she or he is, conversely, perceived as politically neutral by most of Canada's Anglophones. His or her life story is not a story of language struggles.

CASE 3

The following case is an extension of the preceding one. Some aspects of this story are anchored in geographical location. Just as linguistic geography allows for the retracing of ancient strata, with innovations spreading outwards through space and time from creative centers, so certain diachronic aspects of culture seem to be fixed in space and perpetuate themselves locally, as though attached to a single semiotic beam.

Research journal — 6 May 1993

This teacher introduced me to his colleagues with a slightly bitter joke: in a French school, I had spoken to him in English to ask him where visitor parking was. "Now," he says, "people in Montreal are speaking English." He offered me a coffee. For a long time before returning to teaching, he led a parents' association. He was a member of a pressure group. Now he is once more under pressure in his own classroom. He likes children in this age group (11 to 12 years), because they enjoy learning and working. This morning, like every morning, the teacher starts his day with a dictation exercise, immediately after the national anthem and the Lord's Prayer. The dictation text is about the good old days in the Western Plains. The children will ask questions about vocabulary and spelling, and then do peer correction of each other's work. Each pupil has a set place; they raise their hands for permission to speak. The power of digression belongs to the teacher; he assesses the pupils' tiredness and goes from spelling exercises to conjugation and grammar exercises according to their ability to take it in. When I have to leave the classroom to visit the next class, he breaks off and, taking his cue from the dictation text, he asks the pupils if they ever encountered a bear. Two boys, their interest suddenly aroused, raise their hands and want absolutely to recount their experiences.

In the class next door, a very different epistemology prevails. I leave behind homonym lists, past participle agreement, dictation, the forest and the bear in it, and enter a universe of movement and energy. The teacher is conducting a debate on human rights. Her course is solidly rooted in the resolution of day-to-day ethical problems in modern life. The children have recently read *Vincent and Me*, a biography of Van Gogh worked into a little girl's autobiography by means of the plot. In class, the debate revolves around the distinction between honesty and dishonesty. Now, the children are watching a video of the story they've just analyzed. While the movie is running, for every character, they fill in a chart, specifying the character's honest and dishonest actions as events unfold. Most notably, the heroine paints so skillfully that a forger buys her charcoal sketches and sells them as real Van Goghs. The teacher points out how this shows that you can steal ideas or a name. It's a shame

that only the formal aspect of ideas enjoys legal protection. The heroine rebels when her painting teacher reproaches her with not being herself, with just being a copyist. The fact is, the heroine shows such ingenuity in recreating the style of the painter she's modeled herself on, that she can produce infinite variations on his themes, as the painter himself never did...yet it still looks like Van Gogh. The issue we're confronting is the old Homeric one: the author is plural, constituted through tradition.

In Homeric tradition, the narrator's honesty is manifested through respect for the canonical nesting of the scenes and actions that constitute the narrative framework, itself repeatedly rearranged through oral improvisation (Lord, 1965). We researchers of the density and true quality of the real, are we modern-day bards, fashioning the epic deeds of scholarly adventurers in our revues? Charged with the mission of communication, our task would be to communicate the experiences of others by disentangling their plots....Would this make us others' authors, in a Bakhtinian sense, but with affiliations to Ricoeur? Phenomenologists of others' perceptions, would this make us the symbolizing fiction-makers of the motivations for teaching?

I'm coming back down to earth. Soon the video of *Vincent and Me* will be over. The heroine found the forger in Amsterdam and thanks to her he's been caught. The journalist whom the young painter's father assigned to guide her has taken the credit for the forger's capture. She learns of the false claim when she turns on the television. I'm floating on the canals of Amsterdam with the heroine of the movie. This August I'll be attending a conference there. All I know of Holland comes from its writers and some E-mail. The film is over. I'm at the back of a class of 25 pupils. Little by little, the children have come closer to the television monitor; with small stealthy movements, their bodies slumped on tables, they've formed a compact mass, like a raft being gently tossed by a light swell. A gentle atmosphere has filled the classroom. When, abruptly, the light comes on, all the bodies straighten up.

Leaving this rural school, I'm still soaked in the atmosphere of unity created by the story we all lived through together. As I go back into town, the sun beats down on the car I rented for the occasion, and I switch on the air conditioning. I traveled 2,000 miles to meet these teachers, but the difference between the worlds of Manitoba's and Quebec's schools--or even Switzerland's schools, for I encountered similar readings and concerns: *Diana's Runaway*, Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl*--is less than the gulf between the epistemologies of the two classes I observed this morning, with only a wall between them.

Do these teachers talk to each other? This leads me reflect on the academic world as well. Sometimes contact is so easy with colleagues from other universities. The differentness of neighbors requires us to make a mental effort. Thus there is a point of contact between the realities experienced by teachers at different levels. But how could this teacher ever have a sense of the lives of educator-researchers, who are responsible for building meaning across nations? Paradoxically, our timetables limit us little yet we're under great time and space constraints, as we continent-hop in order to communicate points of view.

I was to come back from Amsterdam with little ceramic houses, whose image I've just encountered in Soja's "Thirdspace" (1996, p. 284).

CASE 4

The academic world is an intersection of conceptual and physical geographies. In the following journal entry the geography of the class is imbued with the spirit of an Elizabethan play and becomes the locus of the drama. The teacher embodies the main character and prompts the attainment of historical awareness among the students by spatializing information. He makes history synchronic in a closed space in order to better transmit the acting mind of the play.

The carving up of space into semiotic beams is well illustrated by the centrifugal labyrinth that is Amsterdam, whose levels and islets embody various social segments — some of which are at the heart of the city's reputation.

Research journal — 14 May 1993

Before we went into class, this teacher told me that he knew exactly how the lesson will go and that his planning is worked out down to the word. He outlined his plan to me and then lowered the blinds, partly to create an atmosphere and partly so the transparencies will be easier to read. He's been teaching high school for 26 years. He's given this lesson 26 times and improved it each year, to tne point where it's almost a theatrical performance.

The students arrive. The teacher talks very softly. He's summarizing Macbeth. His voice becomes full and rich, bit by bit he reveals transparencies that have faded over the years. Later, after the lesson, he will explain to me that his improvement for next year will be to redo the transparencies in two colors, red and blue, and in capital letters. The students listen to him with bated breath. A fine public speaker, he plunges us into the universe of Elizabethan beliefs where light represented good and darkness evil. What are we doing in the darkness of this classroom? The light comes from transparencies, illuminating the class with codified knowledge. The objects are invisible but they have been clothed in color.

When attention flags, the teacher raises his voice, walks among the tables, makes striking gestures, asks a question, ties it in with life experiences, suggesting obscure connections. Suddenly, he wakes the students up by comparing Macbeth's powers to those of rock singers. It's a dicey comparison, the court of a Scottish king with rock groupies, but the teacher's speech grows animated and his words flow in an access of contained excitement. For a moment, in the darkness, the students are bewitched. "I" figures ever more prominently among his pronouns, the talk grows personal. I am Macbeth; the teacher strikes his own breast. How shall I control my nobles when the invader is about to strike? These noblemen can't change their colors too soon, it would endanger them; so I have time to bring them together in my castle. There I'll shut them in and I'll have discretionary power....Every anecdote is measured and part of the plan. The teacher takes out a coin and makes it jump on the back of his hand. He calls up the witches, the two sides of life. Macbeth thought he was invincible, he failed to understand the depth of the signs.

After the lesson, the teacher will explain to me how hard it is for seventeen-year-old students to grasp the plot. Since they no longer read, you have to predigest the work for them. Over 26 years, little by little, this teacher has condensed the structural information in *his* lesson, but at the same time he's been careful to flesh it out with anecdotes that are close to their day-to-day lives. Moreover, this lesson has become an exemplum of his personal research on Elizabethan symbolism. He has

become fused with his own lesson, making it into a model for living, a staging of his deepest philosophy, a lesson in ethics, in complicity with the play's great narrative moves.

Still stunned by this display, I am helping him raise the blinds to let light in for the students again. The blind rolls up badly. I tug impatiently at the blind. I wreck the blind. As I leave the classroom after the interview, this teacher observes, with seemingly concealed pity, "That was a successful lesson, apart from my blind that you wrecked." And, as I walk away somewhat embarrassed, I hear him as he gets out a stapler: "I'm used to it, it's been happening to me for 26 years."

An echo of this situation can be found in Stanton Wortham's research, as described in *Acting out participant examples in the classroom* (1994). Wortham notes that in classrooms that follow the philosophy of *paideia*, students and teachers act out social texts. The literary text "provides an implicit script for the classroom interaction itself" (p. vi). "Unwittingly, they adopt the roles described in texts under study and enact the issues, among themselves" (p. v). Through deictic mapping, Wortham reconstructs their spaces of interaction, how the classroom geography maps out the geography of the text. "The students, being members of an underprivileged social group, clearly identify with their subordinate counterparts in the text" (*ibid.*). They act out their roles "while the teachers — themselves members of a higher status group — play the role of the powerful and dominate them" (*ibid.*).

Reasserting a spatialized ontology

In this text, I have said that two ways of approaching spatial conceptualization have been dominant historically. One is top-down and Avicennian; it leads to a view of manifestations and their geography as the breaking through of an integrative meaning (creation being indissociable from the creation of meaning). This integrative meaning is manifested in the creation of meaning families, in the form of meaning beams that bring together "epistemies" using signs that imply the correspondence, or congruence, between mind and matter. This congruence is achieved through the agent intellect — the acting mind. The acting mind is the integrative link between unmanifested meaning and its manifestation. Thanks to the acting mind, space takes on meaning. This conception of space, although referring to origins as the focal site of knowledge, remains ahistorical in principle. A second ahistorical conception was proposed by Edward Soja during the 1980s and further developed in his 1996 book. Based on the data of urban geography, this conception, taking a post-Marxist, metacritical perspective, proposes to valorize spatiality by showing how much geography predetermines both individual and collective action. For example, geographical proximity privileges certain populations, as in the example of Kenya cited above, and certain social classes occupy a dominant geography. This bottom-up version of the emergence of spatial sense is, *a priori*, physical and materialist.

The cases I have cited suggest that in certain educational contexts the Avicennian acting mind would seem to explain the power of metaphor to model space by impacting upon the spatialization of meaning that is its subproduct. In this light, I am inclined to propose a neo-

Avicennian description of spatiality, in the sense that meaning prevails over contingency. The two conceptions, however, may differ because of a simple difference of perspective that could be reconciled within a third perspective. Geography, after all, is under the control of a three-dimensional universe. In four-dimensional space-time, past, present, and future disappear, yielding fully to the redimensionality envisioned by both Avicenna and Edward Soja. History is born of the order imposed upon phenomena by the observer. It is possible to conceive that the lines of individual cohesion would be different in a different dimensionality. This would enable the emergence from an absolute temporal perspective. Becoming relative, time would become regional: it would depend on geographical points of view. A relativist present would design the elsewhere, the omega, for each observer.

Edward Soja's conceptions are politically correct and useful, but no less circumscribed, for all that, by a classical mechanics whose geometry is limited to the domain of the perceptible by the community that shares a given meaning beam. It is realistic to suppose that reflection on other possible dimensionalities would relativize this ontology. For example, reflection would show that spatiotemporal consciousness is wholly circumscribed neither by material forms nor by semiotic models, but rather that their joint actualization gives birth, within the substance of conceptual relations, to meanings in process of becoming, meanings that give energetic nutriment to, and are necessary for the maintenance of, the acting mind.

In discussing the primacy of history or geography, we should not forget that time and space intersect. Many symbolic systems articulate space and time, and the intersection does not always occur to the detriment of space. As an example, I would like to offer the narratives that accompany *dhulaŋs*, the animal map-histories to be found in Australia. The story of a crocodile and its postures presents geographic locations so specifically that one can refer to it for the purposes of travel. Topographical knowledge may be transmitted through myth: "The *dhulaŋ* represents a specific place where the crocodile (an Ancestral Being) lives, and the graphic elements are organised on spatial principles: that is, they are intended to correspond to elements of the landscape. Hence it is a map. However, it is obviously a highly conventional map. In order to be able to read it, you have to know something of the stories, songs and dances of the creation of this landscape by this Ancestral Being and his kin" (Turnbull, 1993, p. 33).

Thus, even the land of the Ancients, its intimate geography, corresponds to a mythic narrative that is transmitted from generation to generation of the Gumatj people to delimit their territory. In this text I believe I have supported the hypothesis that an image can constitute the expression of the acting mind, an expression cast before space and before time, a form that alludes to the elsewhere, to possible complicity, to creative complicity.

Afterwords

Seeking inspiration while I was rereading and rewriting this text, I rented two videos: Wim Wenders' *Wings of Desire* and its American remake *The City of Angels*, starring John Cage and Meg Ryan.

Standing outside time, the angels of Berlin people the space of Los Angeles, like impassive vultures ready to swoop down on ordinary people. They stand everywhere, atop buildings and on the beach, and have a totalizing vision but can only come into true existence if they fall, if they pass to action by taking on a body that bleeds and suffers. "O God! I could be bounded in a nutshell, and count myself a king of infinite space," quotes Soja from Hamlet (II, 2) in his 1989 "Afterwords." And, like the angels in *City of Angels*, Edward Soja contemplates the city in its multiple aspects, listening to the voices of human beings declare their existence in the immobility of time:

> *I have been looking at Los Angeles from many different points of view and each way of seeing assists in sorting out the interjacent medley of the subject landscape. The perspectives explored are purposeful, eclectic, fragmentary, incomplete, and frequently contradictory, but so too is Los Angeles and, indeed, the experienced historical geography of every urban landscape. Totalizing visions, attractive though they may be, can never capture all the meanings and significations of the urban...*
>
> (Soja, 1989, p. 247)

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